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Rep. Hamilton Named to Head House Iran-Contras Inquiry

Nine Democrats, Six Republicans Appointed to Panel

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Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.) was named yesterday to head the House committee that will investigate the Iran arms sales and the diversion of funds to the Nicaraguan contras, a process that his Senate counterpart said could take through next September.

Hamilton, the outgoing chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, was among nine Democrats and six Republicans appointed to the select committee by Speaker-designate James C. Wright Jr. (D-Tex.) and Minority Leader Robert H. Michel (R-Ill.). The Democrats include several leading critics of President Reagan's foreign policy, while the Republicans are among the president's staunchest supporters in the House.

A majority of the committee—the six Republicans and three of the Democrats—voted for aid to the contras in the key House showdown on the issue in June.

Michel named Rep. Dick Cheney (R-Wyo.), the chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee and a White House chief of staff under President Gerald R. Ford, as the ranking Republican on the committee.

Meanwhile, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), chairman of the 11-member Senate select committee that will examine the Iran-contra affair, pledged an "expeditious" investigation but said it is not likely to be concluded until "the end of September."

Inouye also warned foreign governments that may be "tempted to do mischief" during a period of domestic turmoil in the United States that the committee will attempt to "send a message" that the United States remains "vital and viable [and] that we would not stand for any nonsense."

"We view the present situation as potentially explosive and dangerous," Inouye said. "We also know that in the past when adversary countries perceive our leadership [as] being wounded, they are tempted to do mischief . . . I'm not suggesting our president

is wounded badly, but there is no question he has been injured."

Inouye said Senate hearings, to be held in the Russell Building caucus room, scene of the Watergate hearings, are expected to begin in early February.

At a separate news conference, Hamilton said he could not predict the length of the House probe.

"There is a lot we don't know about very critical points," he said, adding that much will depend on the testimony from "two principal witnesses who must come forward," Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, Reagan's former national security adviser, and Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, whom Reagan fired from the NSC staff.

"Let's hear from our two key witnesses," Hamilton said.

However, both Hamilton and Cheney dismissed as "premature" Reagan's call Tuesday for the extension of limited immunity from prosecution to Poindexter and North because of the "urgent need" for a full disclosure of the facts in the Iran-contra affair.

Granting immunity to Poindexter and North "may be necessary, but that is for the committee to decide" after it is formally constituted in January, Cheney said.

Wright said the select committee will be granted "all of the authority and jurisdictional latitude that it will require" in a resolution that will be introduced in the House on Jan. 6, the day the 100th Congress convenes.

Wright's other appointments to the select committee yesterday were Rep. Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.), who will be majority leader in the next Congress; Rep. Edward P. Boland (D-Mass.), a former chairman of the intelligence committee, and Rep. Ed Jenkins (D-Ga.), one of the minority of House Democrats who has supported U.S. aid to the contras.

Earlier, Wright had announced that the chairmen of five House committees would also serve on the select panel. They are Reps. Dante B. Fascell (D-Fla.) of the Foreign Affairs Committee; Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.) of the Judiciary Committee; Jack Brooks (D-Tex.) of the Government Operations Committee; Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), incoming head of the intelligence committee, and Les Aspin (D-Wis.)

of the Armed Services Committee. Fascell was named vice chairman of the select committee.

In addition to Cheney, Michel appointed Reps. William S. Broomfield (R-Mich.), ranking Republican on the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Henry J. Hyde (R-Ill.), ranking GOP lawmaker on the intelligence committee, to the select panel. But Michel bypassed the senior Republicans on the other House committees whose Democratic chairmen will serve on the select panel to appoint three energetic, younger lawmakers who are likely to perform well during televised hearings.

They are Reps. James A. Courter (R-N.J.), a member of the Armed Services Committee; Bill McCollum (R-Fla.), who serves on the Banking and Judiciary committees, and Michael DeWine (D-Ohio), a member of the Foreign Affairs and Judiciary committees. All three are lawyers and DeWine is a former prosecutor.

Wright's appointments of Hamilton, Foley and Boland, leading House opponents of Reagan's policy in Central America, had been widely expected. House Democratic leaders have sought to avoid appearing ready to launch a partisan attack on Reagan's policies, although Wright said Jenkins' support for aid to the contras was not a factor in his selection to the panel.

Calling Jenkins the "quintessential country lawyer," Wright said he was selected because of his "fine legal mind."

The two other Democratic members of the select committee who voted for aid to the contras are Fascell and Aspin.

Hamilton and Inouye both pledged cooperation between the two committees, and Inouye laid out a code of conduct for the Senate panel calling for bipartisan cooperation and the avoidance of leaks. To underscore the bipartisan nature of the probe, Sen. Warren B. Rudman (R-N.H.) was designated vice chairman of the Senate committee.

"The Democrats are not interested in being perceived as trying to get the president and the Republicans are not interested in being perceived as defending the president," Rudman said. "We are only after the truth, wherever that leads."